

Agartala Ashram

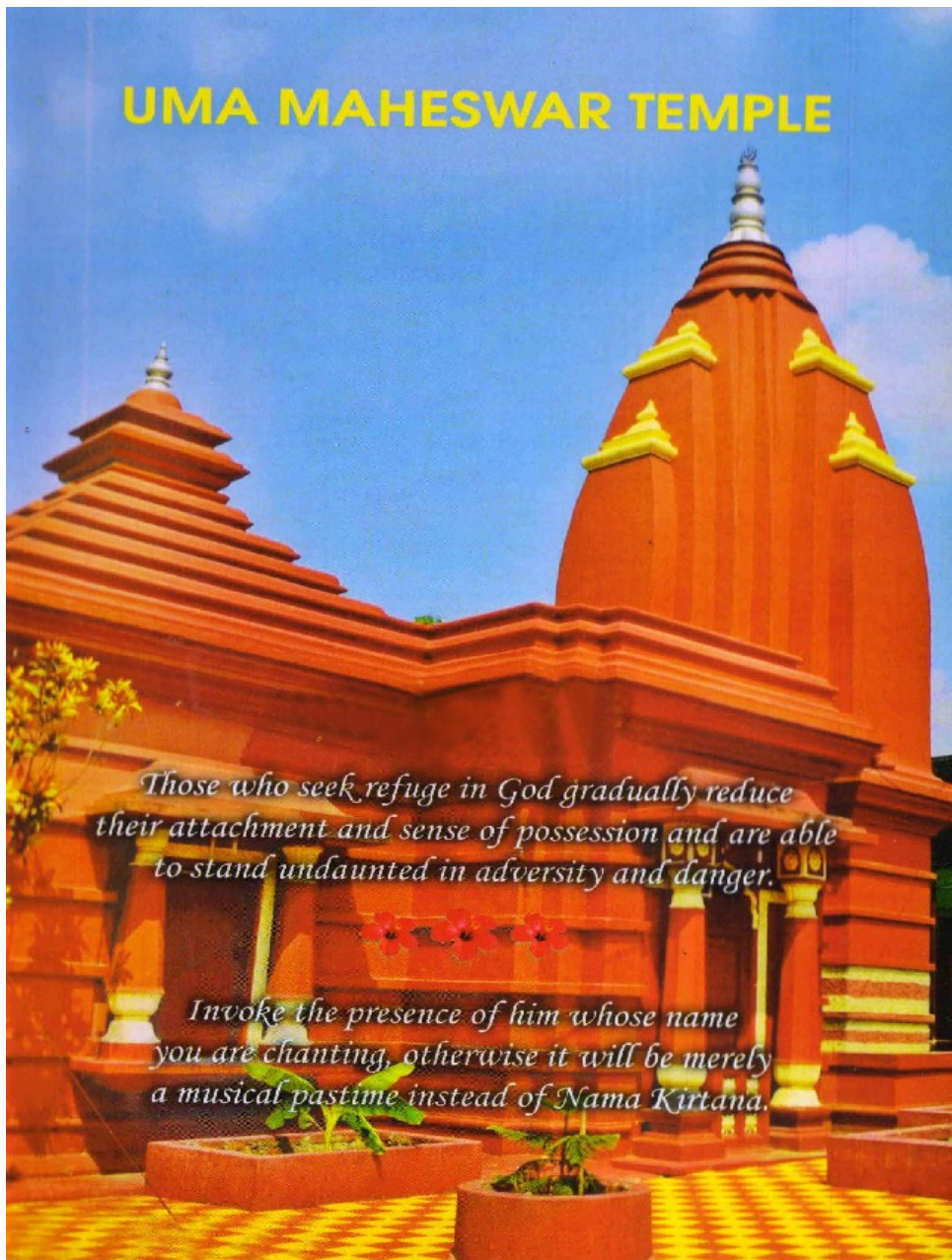
Agartala, the capital of the Tripura State, is a charming hilly place. At the time of the division of the country, some portion of the original Tripura went under Bangladesh and some under India.

Tripura has indeed a very significant place in the divine life of Shree Shree Ma. The birth place of Ma also exists in this ancient state. It was the Kali temple at Kasba near Agartala where Ma's grandmother unconsciously prayed for a grand-daughter in place of a grandson. This place falls just on the boundary of India. The village Kheora, the birth-place of Ma is only at a distance of six miles from this place. This is the place from where the marriage party of Baba Bholanath sitting on an elephant with musical band went to Kheora.

Noble brahmins belonging to the family of Ma's maternal uncle were once the royal priests of Tripura. Therefore, it was quite natural to have an Ashram of Ma in Tripura. Perhaps being influenced by such consideration the present Maharaja of Tripura earnestly prayed to Ma to have an Ashram in her name in Tripura and it was for this purpose that he expressed his willingness to offer to Ma the famous "Uma-Maheswara temple" along with extensive plots of land situated in front of the Royal Palace.

Ma came here in the last week of March 1982 and entered the newly built Ashram on 1st April and visited the well-known temple of Uma-Maheswara, situated within the Ashram campus. Ma brought with her an extremely beautiful image of goddess Saraswati made of white marble. She said: "This body is installing the image of Ma Saraswati, the bestower of Brahma vidya here for ever. The building constructed for this body will be Her temple and Tripureswara Shiva will also be visible from the verandah". Thus Ma Saraswati and Shiva were installed here by Ma herself with her own hands. See the following pages for full details.

Special worship of Ma Saraswati is being conducted here regularly in accordance with Ma's special directions.





Ashram entrance



Uma-Maheshwara

Pride of Tripura - Sri Sri Ma Anandamayee

Brahmachari Panu Da

Tripura, one of the seventh north-east states of India, is not only scenic with all the beauties of the mother nature but it is equally rich with its cultural and spiritual heritage. Ma made her holy appearance for the first time on this earth in this land (though the village Kheora now falls in Bangladesh).

This state is the living place of many a '*lila*' of Sri Sri Ma Anandamayee. Her parental family resided in the village Kheora. There was a Kali temple in Kasba region and grandmother of Sri Ma arrived here to pray to the goddess for a male grandchild when Ma's mother was ex-pecting. However, grandmother actually prayed for a female grandchild to the goddess and Sri Ma came to this earth. She spent her childhood in this village and her wedding also took place here. This village and entire Tripura are proud to be associated with their daughter who became the representative of universal Motherhood.

Maternal side of Ma had a connection with the royal family of Tripura as the male members had been the '*sabha pundits*' (royal priests or scholars) in court since long. They were regarded and respected by the royal family. Ma's maternal grandfather, Sri Ramakanta Bhattacharya, was a famous scholar of his time. Her father, Sri Bipin Bihari Bhattacharya, approached the royal family of Agartala for an elephant for the wedding ceremony of Ma. The groom's party took out the wedding procession with this elephant from Kasba Kali temple.

Arrival of the King of Tripura and the initial talk on the establishment of the Ashram

Ma was staying in Poona (now Pune) in the 1970s when the King

of Tripura happened to visit for her *darshan*. She told the King when he entered her room, "How come you are here? When have you arrived? You have come to me after long time." The King offered his regards to Her and said, "I'm here for some special work and have come here when I came to know You are here. You have your ashrams all over the country except Tripura." Ma said, "this physical body does not do anything. You people establish the ashrams and you know it better."

The King was moved by Her words that touched his heart deeply. He wanted to avail of this opportunity and discussed the issue with the then Chief Minister of Tripura, Sri Sukhomay Sengupta, immediately after his return to Agartala. Sri Sengupta adored Sri Ma deeply and offered all his cooperation. There is a big lake in front of the royal palace surrounded by three temples from three sides. Uma Maheshwar temple is situated in the east, Jagannath temple in the west while Laxminarayan temple is located in the south. All these temples earlier belonged to the royal family but were transferred to the government after the merge of the royal estate to the Government of India. It was the earnest initiative of Sri Sengupta and the King of Tripura that Uma Maheshwar temple along with its sprawling compound was officially dedicated to the service of Ma on October 4, 1977. Contributions of Sri Priyadas Bhattacharya was notable in this whole process of transfer. It was his personal initiatives that king also donated a piece of land adjoining to the lake to the service of Sri Ma. Eventually, Sri Sri Ma Anandamayee Vidyapeeth was raised on this land and this institution has been making all of us proud since its inception.

We observed many a *lila* of Sri Ma in this Ashram. How we, the common people, can understand these *lilas*! Ma Herself solved the problem of her living quarter in the Ashram compound at a time when its location was not decided. And, She did it while staying away in a long distance in Haridwar.

Sri Ma developed a *kheyal* (desire) to organise Saraswati Puja in the Ashram. It was towards the end of January in 1978 when She

called me and directed me to arrange the Puja in the land north of Her proposed living quarter. She also instructed me to specify the location. Her directives made others curious as to why the Saraswati Puja being organised before the construction of Her living quarter. Sri Ma developed the same *kheyal* next year and the Puja was arranged. I came over to Agartala and organised the event with the cooperation of the devotees. A brick platform was built up on the site under Ma's instruction and the reason was not known. Neither Ma disclosed it.

Living quarter of the Sri Ma was about to get completed and Her devotees were eagerly awaiting Her arrival. But She was not keeping well at that time and She was residing in Vrindavana (March 1982). However, she called me one day and asked me to come to Her with an almanac. She asked others to leave Her room and asked me to close the door. She then asked me to find out an auspicious date for the inauguration. I found the date March 31 that fell in the holy *Navaratra* festival. Ma calmly said, "Arrange to take this body there before that date. Condition of this physical body is not well. It may not happen at all, if delayed." I became surprised but it was Her *kheyal* (desire) that I spontaneously pronounced "Agartala?" She said, "Strictly keep it to yourself for now. You leave tomorrow and make all the arrangements. I will leave once you return." I was again surprised to know Her instruction and said, "Assam and Tripura are under turbulence now-a-days. It takes 45 minutes to reach Agaratala from Kolkata by plane but it will take about four days by train. Ma, how will you travel such a long distance under your present physical condition?" Ma was determined and made it clear that She would go, "This body will travel lying in train and cars." I wanted to know who else would accompany Her because tickets would be booked in advance. Ma said, "Names cannot be disclosed right now. Book the tickets for ten people including yourself and don't ask any more question."

I was totally puzzled and spent a sleepless night. I could not understand how arrangements would be made to take Ma to Tripura under such a disturbed situation. Besides, Her poor health status was a

matter of great concern to me. I was helpless as I was unable to discuss the matter with anybody because of Ma's strict instruction. I met Her to offer my regards next morning before my departure from Vrindavana. Ma told me, "Make arrangements to construct one platform (white marble) on the site of Saraswati Puja and another platform on the south facing verandah of the living quarter. Go and finish these work and get back to me with the information of my journey." I found myself in trouble because my only concern was safe journey of Ma. I went deep in my thought while travelling to Delhi and all of a sudden I found a solution from my inner conscience - I can take suggestion from one person, Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. I will surely narrate the whole situation to her and later will offer my apology to Sri Ma for disobeying Her instruction.

I called Mrs. Gandhi's secretary, Mr. Dhawan, from a telephone booth of the New Delhi railway station and requested for an appointment with her only for ten minutes. Mr. Dhawan already knew me, immediately came to action after hearing the name of Mother. I rushed to PM residence and found her being ready to leave for the Parliament. She eagerly enquired about Sri Ma's and I explained everything to her. Mrs. Gandhi too became surprised to know about the long train journey. She exclaimed how come Sri Ma is keen to visit Assam and Tripura in this situation full of turbulence. Mrs. Gandhi, however, asked me to meet her secretary the same evening and she said she would talk to Sri Vidya Charan Shukla, the then Railway Minister, and get back to me. She just wanted to know the date of Sri Ma's journey. I heaved a great sigh of relief and realised that this latest development is again the *kheyal* of the Sri Ma Herself.

I met Sri Dhawan in the afternoon and got the information that a special coach (compartment) would be attached to the main train for the Ma from Delhi to Dharmanagar. Besides, Central Government will take every step for Her safety and security and details have already been sent to Tripura Government in this respect. Again, I could realise the miracle of our beloved Ma.

I left for Varanasi and informed one of Ma's nearest devotees, Sri

Priyadas Babu about my visit to Agartala. More surprise was awaiting to me in Agartala as I found the then DGP of Tripura, Sri Ramen Bhattacharya, along with Sri Priyadas Babu who came to receive me in the airport. Sri Priyadas Babu enquired from me about the arrival of Ma and I got the point that official instructions had already arrived from Delhi. I, however, requested him not to disclose the news as Ma did not want it to be disclosed at this stage.

Our next steps were to chalk out the route from Dharmanagar to Agartala as Ma would be travelling by car on this route. Besides, we also discussed the halt for Ma to take rest as well as Her stay in the night of March 30 in Agartala and Her journey back to Kolkata. The DGP informed that the Central Government would be making arrangements for Her security upto Dharmanagar while the Tripura Government would do the same in the State.

Priyadas Babu told in the afternoon that official instructions have already arrived from Delhi and we must inform the Tripura Chief Minister as a part of protocol. Accordingly, we met the then Chief Minister, Sri Nripendranath Chakravorty, next morning. I requested his 'help' and he immediately replied, "Tripura is a poor state. How can we help you?" I made it clear that Sri Ma is coming and She is the daughter of Tripura. Situation is not normal here and I, therefore, seek your help." The Chief Minister uttered after a pause, "Will do whatever is possible." He then said, "I often rushed to Her after my school is over when I was studying in Dhaka. "Sri Chakravorty was a staunch Marxist but a man of his own words, said Priyadas Babu, adding that he would definitely do his duty. Later, his regards to Sri Ma was reflected on several occasions.

I felt great relief and instructed Priyadas Babu before leaving for Delhi via Kolkata. I deposited the train fares to a railway officer after meeting Mr. Dhawan in Delhi. My next destination was Vrindavana and there I met Sri Ma and after narrating all the details handed over the train tickets to Her. I also offered my apology to Ma for disobeying Her. She listened to me but did not react.

It was an elaborate arrangement when we gathered at the Delhi Railway Station on March 26 with Sri Ma. Her troupe included ailing Swami Paramanandaji, Dr. Triguna Sen, Brahmachari Nirvanananda, Brahmachari Shantivrata, Brahmachari Dashu and some Her close female assistants and myself. There were as many as ten commandoes and one commandant travelling along with Sri Ma's coach. Except myself, members of the party have no knowledge where they were travelling to and none of them dare to ask this question. Ma's troupe reached Dharmanagar on March 29 after travelling three nights and the security personnel left here after offering their regards to Her.

At this point, DGP of Tripura, Mr. Ramendra Bhattacharya, himself undertook the security charge and escorted Sri Ma and Her convoy with a huge police force. The convoy reached Manu in the afternoon for a night halt in a guest house. Ma reached Agartala next day on March 30 and She stayed in a new police quarter in the city. Meanwhile, the news of Sri Ma's arrival spread all over and the people thronged to the place of Her stay. Even the Maharaja of Tripura came to have Her *darshan*. He repeatedly expressed his gratitude that Ma ultimately arrived in Tripura to honour his request without caring Her ailing health.

It was the early dawn of March 31, 1982 when Ma arrived the Uma Maheshwar temple. It's a beautiful temple and also known as Kali temple because goddess Uma or Parvati is known as Mahakali here. There is a temple on the left side of this temple and there are spherical stones placed on the platform. It is said that these stones are the gods of the tribal community of Tripura. Ma sat here for sometime and went around entire temple compound before leaving for her own living quarter. She also offered valuable clothes she brought with her for the Uma Maheshwar temple.

Ma entered her newly constructed living quarter with *narayana shila* and auspicious pitcher. She looked curious to see two platforms which had been constructed on her instruction - one in the north corner of Her room and another in the south facing balcony. She

privately opened the giant trunks She brought with Her from Delhi. A beautiful white marble Saraswati idol was taken out first followed by idols of Narmadeshwar Siva, Parvati, Ganesha, Nandi, and Gouripeeth. Beautiful Sartaswati idol was brought from Jaipur while Narmadeshwar, Parvati, Ganesha (made of white marble) and Gouripeeth (made of black stone) were brought from Varanasi. Nandi was brought from Kankhal. It is the same Nandi that was once placed by the side of the Ma when Brahmacharinis worshipped Her as Siva in Kankhal (1981).

The idol of Saraswati was installed on the altar inside Sri Ma's room during an auspicious occasion by the priests of Tripura royal family while Narmadeshwar Siva idol was installed on another altar in the balcony. Ma announced Tripureshwar Siva Mahadev would offer His *darshan* right from this point. Other rituals like, oblation, process of consecrating, *bhoga* etc. were completed under Her instruction. By now, devotees and common people realised that all the ceremonies happened at the behest of Sri Ma's divine wish or *kheyal*. Also, it was Her divine *kheyal* that Saraswati Puja was held twice here. Yet, it remained still a mystery as to why Ma installed the Saraswati idol in the Ashram. Only future can answer!

One of the Mother's devotees spread the news of her arrival in Tripura through radio and it spread out like wildfire. Hundreds of people crowded the Ashram making the task of the security a difficult one. They raised slogans praising Sri Ma and wanted to have Her *darshan*, even for a single moment. Ma also did not disappoint them as She frequently came out of Her room to offer Her blessings to the people. It was an unforgettable scene. I was standing by Her side and reminded myself what Sri Ma had told me in Vrindavana, "be sure not even a bird can know about my visit".

I recall another small incident. Session of the Tripura Vidhan Sabha was going on at that time and a member of opposition questioned the Chief Minister, "Why the Tripura Government is so active for the smooth visit of one lady?" (Ma's name and status were not mentioned

by him). Chief Minister simply replied back, "She is the Guest of Honour in Tripura and we are doing the needful."

Ashram remained crowded throughout day and night and hundreds even returned back without Her *darshan*. Sri Ma realised their frustration and She missed Her sleep that night. She left Agartala next morning to reach Kolkata via Dharmanagar. She pronounced before Her departure, "I am leaving this room for the Goddess of Wisdom, Saraswati, who also provides *brahma-jnana*." She visited the temples of the Royal Palace at the request of the Maharaja. I showed the land donated by the Maharaja to Ma. She said, this land should be used for something good and Her words came true. Our Vidyapeeth was built upon this land which is situated just by the side of the Ashram where Goddess Saraswati is installed.

Ma then came over to the official residence of Sri Ramendra Babu. He arranged a beautiful tent on the lawn for Her rest. Chief Minister visited Ma and they held a private session for about half-an-hour. It was really a miracle that a Communist, who once declared himself as an atheist, became a totally changed person after meeting Ma. He even used to recite the *Bhagavat Gita*.

Ma left for Kolkata. Her divine grace to the people of Tripura is till remembered with due respect and fondness. This place is especially blessed because Sri Ma arrived on this earth in this very region.

Jai Ma! Jai Uma Maheshwar! Jai Tripureshwari!
